

## Marlowe Presents the Greed of a Renaissance Man in Dr. Faustus

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### Abstract

*The aim of this present article is to analyze greed of the Renaissance man during the transitional phase between the medieval to the early Renaissance period in the development of human civilization. Christopher Marlow's Doctor Faustus was published in 1592, where a man sells his soul to Satan for power and knowledge. It is the theme of a Renaissance man that has the desire of acquiring unlimited knowledge, individualism, free play of mind, power and pleasure. The hero of the play is at the peak of his achievement and finishes with his collapse into misery, death and damnation. So, Doctor Faustus who pursues false knowledge is given the severest penalty in the form of mental disturbance and unrest through and till the end of his life. At last, he seems to repent and regret for his actions but it is too late. Mephistopheles gathers his soul and Faustus goes with him to hell.*

**Keywords:** Doctor Faustus, soul, power, Renaissance, greed

### Introduction

It is estimated that *Doctor Faustus* was written shortly after Marlowe had finished his education at Cambridge. It remained popular in the early seventeenth century until the closing of the theatres in 1642 after which it seems to have been forgotten until its revival in the mid eighteenth century. The play was likely popular due to its intense vision and dramatic themes which dealt with sin, evil and the consequences of personal ambition and greed. To the present day, it remains Marlowe's most performed and most critically discussed play (David Bevington).

*Doctor Faustus* is based on the German story of Doctor Faustus or Faust who sold himself to the Devil, appeared at Frankfort in 1587. *The Historie of the Damnable Life and Deserved Death of Doctor John Faustus* was its *English* translation, appeared in 1588. Though the real Faustus was active in early sixteenth century and was translated into English in 1592 which shows anti-Catholic view. It is the first great tragedy in the English language, a powerful play that guided in thirty years of unparalleled dramatic creativity on the English stage. For over 400 years, Marlowe's most often read and most frequently performed play has been surrounded by assumption; indeed, few worms of literature have remained such violent critical controversy as Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* (John C. Coldewey).

It was the time of beginning of Renaissance and end of The Medieval period. At that moment, there was tremendous change in Europe. The Renaissance is specifically applied to the widespread culture revival, the new wave gradually spreading over Western Europe and England. The renewal of learning, new geographical discoveries and more significantly the rebellion against the medieval pattern of living and thinking dominated by religious belief and Christian theology were the main sources of inspiration. *Doctor Faustus* represents the trend of the early renaissance values of humanism, individualism and free play of mind; will to power, pleasure and knowledge. Here Marlowe presents the hunger of the modern man during the transitional phase between the medieval to the early Renaissance period in the development of human civilization.

Faustus's uncertainties over his own actions are the true representatives of the anxiety of the early Renaissance people. Marlowe's gives excessive emphasis on the Renaissance early values. It also borrows elements from the traditional morality play of the early modern period which commonly uses allegory and symbolism to instruct moral lessons for audiences. Abstract concepts such as temptation and sin as well as regret and damnation are represented through characters such as the good and evil angels, the Old Man and the seven deadly sins (Cole, Douglas).

Individualism and worldliness were the main ingredients of this new spirit and these two traits found manifestation in many forms such as longing for knowledge, learning without shackles, love of beauty, spirit of adventure, sky-high ambition and supreme desire of power. Marlowe himself was the product of the Renaissance. He was saturated with the spirit of the Renaissance with its great desire for limitless knowledge with its extreme ambition. Marlowe's Dr. Faustus seems to be the veritable incarnation of the genius and spirit of the Renaissance, as his character reveals a great thirst for limitless knowledge, power and wealth, a craving for sensual pleasures of life, a defying spirit of atheism and also a spirit of revolt against conventional religious doctrines, and Christian divinity.

One of the most significant characteristics of the Renaissance was individualism that led to the spirit of revolt to free the human mind from the shackles and dogmas of the Church and

feudalism. And Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* with all his learning and scholarship, with his abnormal pride and presumption discusses in his very first monologue, in the first scene, the merit and demerits of all the important branches of study and has the great courage to take his own decision, right or wrong, and to declare without the least hesitation.

Marlowe develops a character who has a great inclination to learning, having and fulfilling his desires. These are the typical characteristics of the early Renaissance people. *Doctor Faustus* holds the rising modern values but this Renaissance man has a terrible damnation, a fearful death, because it is planned by his own deal with the devil. So, the point Marlowe makes through his play is that the new path people were being tempted to take during his time was to be the path to their own destruction.

### **Life of Christopher Marlowe**

Christopher Marlowe, who lived between 1564 and 1593, has been recognized as one of the most prominent playwrights of the late sixteenth century, composed several popular plays before his death in 1592. *Doctor Faustus* remains Marlowe's most discussed tragedy and has been the subject of considerable scholarship as well as many theatrical revivals (Deats, Sara Munson and Robert A. Logan). He is the most famous English tragic writer after William Shakespeare of Elizabethan era, known for his blank verse. He was born in 1564 in the same year of Shakespeare's birth. His father was a shoemaker and his mother also had humble origins. Marlowe learned from him that power is the symbol of existence and he inherited from his father the power in his plays. He is a well-known Renaissance writer who received a Classical education in grammar schools (Logan, Robert A.).

He went to King's School and was awarded a scholarship. After his schooling, he joined the University of Cambridge in 1580. He obtained a Bachelor of Arts and Philosophy in 1584 and then extended his studies for six years, but in 1587 the university hesitated in granting him his master's degree. The university inquired about his activities and seemed suspicious in awarding him the degree for he was long absent from Cambridge and suspected that he had converted to Roman Catholicism and would soon attend college elsewhere.

He had several lengthy absences from the university, much longer than allowed by the school's regulations. And extant dining room accounts indicate that he spent extravagantly on food and drink while there, greater amounts than he could have afforded on his known scholarship income. Both of these could point to a secondary source of income, such as secret government work. When the Privy Council sent a letter declaring that he was now working "on matters touching the benefit of his country," and he was awarded his master's degree on schedule (Hutchinson, 2006: 111).

After leaving Cambridge, he went to London where he spent a delightful and charming life. He was a friend of the dramatist Thomas Kyd and accompanied Walter Raleigh and other famous

intellectuals such as the group of the School of the Night. Marlowe's writings caused violent reactions and earthquakes whether due to admiration or hatred. He was as a writer glorified the Renaissance passion under the slogan of unlimited science.

His first play, *Dido, Queen of Carthage*, was not published until 1594, but it is generally thought to have been written while he was still a student at Cambridge. It is a mixture between the disgusting violent tragedy and comedy through the point of view of a man lost between abjection and material. According to records, the play was performed by the Children of the Chapel, a company of boy actors, between 1587 and 1593. His play *Tamburlaine the Great* in 1587-1588, speaks of ambition which made him a ghost terrifying the world. In 1592, His play *Edward II* spoke in a historical and tragic way about something that modern writers did not dare talk about, that is homosexuality. He also wrote five known poems though none of them made it into print during his lifetime. Perhaps, his best play is *Dr. Faustus* which is taken from the German story of Dr. Faust dealing with the outrageous human sin in the Bible and evokes the man's tortured conscience (Deats, 2004: 193).

The constant rumors of Marlowe's atheism finally caught up with him in 1593, and he was arrested for just that crime. Despite the gravity of the charge, however, he was not jailed or tortured but was released on the condition that he report daily to an officer of the court. On May 30, however, Marlowe was killed by Ingram Frizer. Supposedly, after spending the day together with Marlowe in a lodging house at Deptford, a fight broke out between Marlowe and Frizer over the bill of food, and Marlowe was stabbed in the forehead and killed (Boas, 101). Frizer claimed self-defense and was acquitted on charges of murder at the official investigation. But there were several conspiracy theories about the death of Marlow. His literary career ended at age twenty-nine though many of his works continued to be performed until the closing of the theatres in 1642.

### **Research Method**

This study is a descriptive qualitative research. I conduct formal object and material object for this study. There are two data sources: primary data source and secondary data source. Primary data source is *Dr. Faustus* novel and secondary data source consisting books, journal, articles and internet to complete the data analysis. In the techniques of collecting data, I use five steps

- i. Reading and understanding the play *Dr. Faustus*.
- ii. Browsing and reading the related articles, journals and some other information in the internet.
- iii. Taking important notes from the related books and articles for the study.
- iv. Identifying the problem in *Dr. Faustus*.
- v. Making conclusion based on the results.

### **Story of play- *Dr. Faustus*:**

Doctor Faustus, a well-respected German scholar, grows dissatisfied with the limits of traditional forms of knowledge—logic, medicine, law and religion. He feels that he has reached the ends of all traditional studies so he decides to pursue magic. His servant Wagner brings two men Valdes and Cornelius to instruct him in the black arts, and he begins his new career as a magician. Two angels, a Good Angel and an Evil Angel, appear. The Good Angel tries to convince Faustus not to pursue unholy magic, but the Evil Angel encourages him to explore into sorcery. Valdes and Cornelius give Faustus spell-books and Faustus is excited to begin casting spells and calling spirits.

Suddenly Mephistophilis appears, in the form of an ugly devil but Faustus sends him away, telling to reappear in the form of a friar. Faustus bargains Mephistophilis that if Faustus is given twenty-four years of absolute power, he will then sell his soul to Lucifer. After that, a Good Angel and a Bad Angel each encourages him to follow his advice. But Faustus agrees to sign a contract in blood with the devil even though several omens appear and warn him not to make this bond. As soon as he signs the contract, words appear on his arm, which give him doubts about what he has just done. Faustus urges for the forgiveness then to divert his mind, Mephistophilis and Lucifer both display the seven deadly sins before Faustus.

Faustus has explored the heavens and the earth from a chariot drawn by dragons then Mephistophilis takes Faustus into the pope's private chambers in Rome, where invisibly they play pranks on the pope and some unsuspecting friars. After that, they go to the German emperor's court, where Faustus presents illusions that gives pleasure to the Emperor. After humiliating a knight, he makes a pair of horns appear on his head. They go off to the court of the Duke to settle scores with Faustus. Faustus entertains the Duke and Duchess with magic, before Robin the Clown and his band of ruffians arrives.

Nearing the end of the twenty-four years, Faustus prepares for certain death, leaving everything to Wagner. A religious old man warning Faustus to repent but Mephistophilis threatens Faustus with physical violence. Hopelessly, Faustus asks Mephistophilis to call Helen of Troy, the famous beauty to serve as his final luxury.

Later, Faustus tells his scholar friends that he is ruined, and that his power came at the price of his soul. Finally, the night on which Faustus must surrender his soul arrives. Along with Faustus' scholar friends, the Good Angel leaving Faustus to meet his fate, while Mephistophilis, Lucifer and the Evil Angel tease him. When the Clock strikes eleven, Faustus gives a final, frantic monologue, regretting his choices. At midnight the devils enter. As Faustus begs God and the devil for mercy, but the devils drag him into the deep hole. Later, the Scholar friends find Faustus' body, torn to pieces. The chorus warns the audience to remember the story of Faustus and also the lessons it offers where a man wasted his potential for a chance at supremacy.

## **Meaning of Renaissance:**

The Renaissance means re-birth or re-awakening which was originated in the belief that Europeans had discovered the superiority of Greek and Roman culture after many centuries of what they considered intellectual and culture decline. It is the widespread cultural revival marking the division between the so called dark ages and the modern world. It started in Florance in the fourteenth century and spread across Europe.

The main aim of Renaissance was to discover the books of ancient Greece and Rome and study them again. The intent of the Renaissance was to refresh the ideas and beliefs of the ancient Greek and Roman cultures in the areas concerning God, humanity and nature, and to portray these ideas in art, architecture, literature and behavior, in contrast to the ways of thinking of the Middle Ages, which incorporated portraying the human form in reference to a religious figure or theme (Pioc).

Humanism was the most noteworthy intellectual movement of the Renaissance which emphasized the worldly affairs of human beings. It is learning about ways to improve the lives of humans in this world. Humanists believed that it was worthless to think about God and the life after death because death and destruction were inevitable. They thought life after death would not help in building a successful and happy life in the present world. Humanists not only changed their views to improve human life in this world materially but also improve human life spiritually (Witt, 9). They don't pay attention to others' opinions or what the community says. Instead of that they wanted to have their own thoughts and to challenge others. They are superior in their own resolution.

But the Medieval society focused on God, death, and the afterlife. They spent most of their lives thinking about the last decision and ways to save their souls. Consequently, they portrayed the human form in a manner that served their religious beliefs and goals. Due to this, the art during that period was centered on the court, the monastery and the cathedral (Witt 292). Opposite of that, the Renaissance complained the supremacy of Catholic pope in Vatican. In the same way, Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* also challenges Christianity and takes the supports of the evil. His character Faustus does not only show his rejection to religion by selling his soul to the evil agent of Satan, Mephistophilis and signing a bond for twenty-four years with him but also he makes fun of Pope and monks in Rome.

There was an intellectual curiosity during the Renaissance. The new discoveries in science and developments in technology went beyond mere material advances. It was a youthful age to which nothing seems impossible. Before the European, this period opened a new world of imagination which motivated them and they believed that everything was possible and achievable. The Renaissance man was fascinated by new learning and knowledge. He took all knowledge to be his area and considered it to be his power. He developed a greedy thirst for

further curiosity, knowledge, power, beauty, riches, respect for classicism and worldly pleasures. The writer of this era represented their age in their work. Marlowe is the greatest and truest representative of his age. So the Renaissance influence is seen in every one of his plays. *Dr. Faustus* represents the Renaissance spirit in various ways.

As the play begins, Dr. Faustus who is a German scholar shows his greed for knowledge. He is not satisfied with literature, law, theology, history and medicine because they don't give him power. He wants to achieve something new and different. So, he decides to master necromancy and chooses the black magic in order to have absolute knowledge and boundless power for gratifying his sensual pleasures of life. His thirst for knowledge, enlightenment, wealth, fame and strength reflects the spirit of the Renaissance. In all, the Renaissance could be viewed as an attempt by intellectuals to study and improve the material and worldly, both through the revival of ideas from antiquity, and through novel approaches to thought. The Renaissance sparked people to travel and learn about new expeditions and discoveries of new continents. The more they explored new places, the more wealth they had.

### **Greed of Renaissance man:**

Elizabethan playwright Christopher Marlowe's literary talent was recognized by contemporaries such as Thomas Heywood and Henry Petowe, as well as modern writers William Hazlitt and James Broughton. They accepted Marlowe as one of the first class of dramatic writers of the Renaissance period (Patrick Cheney). But, his literary career truly came to the front in the nineteenth century when there was a growing attraction with the study of Renaissance plays. In this period, he was recognized as one of several major English writers and his works were compared to his generation such as Shakespeare, Milton and Johnson.

Marlowe represents two different qualities like greed and pride in his main character Dr. Faustus which lead him to his destruction. Faustus already has everything that any person in his time could possibly need. He has already gained all that he can materially and intellectually, being very wealthy as well as a master of logic, medicine, and law. Even though he is the most brilliant scholar in the world however, he is not satisfied and feels himself limited by mere human knowledge and wealth. So, due to his greed for a power greater than he is meant to have, he sacrifices his soul to Satan. He has thirst to become a more powerful man than he disrespects divinity and turns to magic to solve his problems. He desires a godlike power over life and death (R.J. Kaufmann).

The character of Faustus has been interpreted in several different ways. Some scholars see him as a tragic humanist hero whose search for knowledge and personal ambition leads to his downfall. Others see him as a foolish individual who wastes his achieved power on playful pursuits and childish activities. Those studying the religious feelings of the play attempt to distinguish his

actions as self-guided and to which extent he is victim to forces of good and evil beyond his control. It is difficult to evaluate how they would have sympathized and identified with Faustus' character, or how much they would have judged and blamed him for his own damnation. Nevertheless, he remains a complex character whose searching of sin, damnation, salvation and regret may have spoken to post-Reformation audience members who were themselves struggling with these concepts (Harry Levin).

Although people with divided mentality tried to adopt the new modern value of the renaissance humanism; free play of mind; individualism; will to power and knowledge. They had conflicts within their mind and between themselves. People who followed new values were worried about the consequences because they still had the established medieval Christian values remaining inside them. They also wanted to adopt new values if they were good to them. And, others who were determined to modernity were also in the socio-cultural barriers. They had ambition to do extraordinary work for their satisfaction but they were not willingly accepted in the society. The character Faustus, the metaphorical Good and the Bad Angels and the Old Man in the play show their confidence and regret in emerging Renaissance society.

Dr. Faustus receives a doctorate degree in spirituality but is dissatisfied with it. He is in greed to do something different which could provide him more benefits in terms of knowledge, power, and possessions. He decides to give up Divinity and study black magic by challenging the established cultural norms of God-worship. He could be strictly criticized for this decision in his society where God-worship is still in practice. His courage to use his own conscience proves him a renaissance man. Faustus abjures God "in the hope of becoming something more than a man" (Routledge 32). At first, he has noble goals: he wants to gain more knowledge about the working of the world, its Cause, and he wishes to make his country the most powerful country in the world. As the time passes, instead of gripping to his noble power, he commits himself to some practical jokes and to the entertainment of aristocrats.

He thinks that religious moral values were limiting the development potentialities and worshipping God put God on the top of the hierarchy and man always below Him. In his concept, moral tradition controlled man from being ambitious, having self declaration, and possession of physical wealth. Faustus represents the people of renaissance time, who were against such social and religious boundaries. Marlowe saw the human self-affirmation of the renaissance people as a courageous rebellion against the established socio-cultural norms. However, Marlowe presents this courage to be suicidal.

Faustus only thinks about himself and ignores morality. He calls spirit from the Hell to disregard God and His Heaven. He has courage to rebel against God's authority. He shows his respect towards devils spirits and denies God's supremacy. He has courage to move away himself from God and Heaven to devil and Hell as a Renaissance man. Hell is the revolution against God and is the declaration of self. His concept of loving Hell than Heaven is his self-freedom, will to power and ownership. God-worship lowers humans under the authorship of



God. It is his self-assertion and desire for self-development and possession that charms him to give up Divinity and adopt necromancy.

By presenting Faustus a rebellious character, Marlowe is addressing the people's greed of renaissance time to possess power, property, superiority and knowledge. That was the time of claim of one's individuality, liberation from old order and the free play of mind: no matter what the ways are. Here, Faustus has been presented as having "restless curiosity, the violent imagination and the risky desires of a man responding fully and delightedly to the new trends in his age and the possibilities they seem to open up" (*Doctor Faustus*, editor's notes, 25). But it is so ironical of Faustus that to have all these, he sells his own body and soul to the devil, who is to provide him whatever he wants.

After learning necromancy, Faustus is excited to possess wealth and power, the fame of an emperor through Mephistopheles which is against the established medieval norms. Rather than serving God, he thinks he will serve his self and fulfil his desires and develop his potentiality. He reassumes his humanity. His self-assertion and desire of power and possession is unlimited and extreme. Such person who breaks the existing norms really has the quality of Renaissance man. But there is also an irony in the play. Faustus signs a deal with a devil that after completion of those twenty-four years, his body and soul both would belong to the devil. This indicates that whatever does is just only to take him to his own destruction which suggests that greed or excessive ambition lead anyone towards his own destruction (Greg, 96).

Faustus is worried about his deal and he is instable about what to do. There is conflict in his mind and he feels as if someone is speaking to him. He wants to go back to God-worship. He is upset about selecting black magic necromancy and signing a deal with the devil. In this situation, the good angel tries to convince him as heaven and heavenly things and the bad angel as honour and wealth. During the deal-sign, he has to write with his blood, which is also not ready to flow signifying that it is unwilling to take the path to honour and wealth by selling its own life. He is conscious about it and says, "My blood congeals, and I can write no more" (v, 62). He is not only willing for honour and wealth as promised by the devil but also wants to go into a different path. It proves the people of Marlowe's time are also in their separated mentality.

After getting power, Faustus forgets his fortune and enjoying all worldly pleasures but during the last hours of his life, he becomes sad. He is powerless to ask forgiveness and his greed turns into deep melancholy over his self-brought destruction. This is quite similar to the Renaissance men running after wealth and power guided by their high ambitions ignoring a single aspect of morality, human mortality, and the risky effects of their behavior on nature. At the last hour of his life, when Faustus tries to get out of that bond, he is tempted by the devil to sleep with Helen, succubae, for the luxurious lives. According to the religious value, it is believed that a

man who sleeps with a succubae loses his soul and hence no chance for liberation. And chance of getting pardoned by God's mercy.

Thus Marlowe represents Dr. Faustus as the greedy Renaissance men of his time. His departure from the existing socio-cultural norms, variation between firmness and regret, reflexivity over his own situation, his declaration on his self-exploration, individuality, courage to adopt new values and to face the challenges, his decision not to accept God or the breaking from the medieval value of God-worship indicate him a Renaissance man. But his modernity is taken as the cause of his own destruction thereby warning the people of that time and thereafter to be thoughtful.

### **Conclusion:**

Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus* describes the tragedy of Renaissance man. Dr. Faustus becomes the epitome of a Renaissance man who is shocked with the medieval view of a man who is passive in the world, a sinner man beyond liberation, a man without power and who is under the control of his own fate. Faustus, an example of Renaissance man, goes against of this fixed and useless view of man. He wants to go above his position in the world and to deny existence of God from his dominant position. His desire is to rise above the limitations of humanity and get higher achievements and heights. He wants to prove that he can become greater than he presently is. Because of his desire to go beyond human limitations, Faustus is willing to chance damnation in order to achieve his goals.

Faustus's anxiety, greed and his variation and instability are also remarkable to interpret him as a Renaissance man. He is not satisfied with a single thought and swifts to and fro. He is not fully certain of the way he has caught although he has some trust on new knowledge. A man of Renaissance believes in modernity and new knowledge but his nervousness about Hell and Heaven, Devil and God shows the unsteadiness of a man who has the modern concept.

Dr Faustus as a Renaissance man has the decision making power to follow the new developing field of knowledge and to choose the path of achieving power and property which are not allowed by the existing medieval religious values. He has the courage to challenge the existing socio-cultural norms and is excited to get everything whatever he wants. But, here Marlowe wants to say that people with Faustus-like characters are themselves bringing their own destruction.

According to the Renaissance view, Faustus rebels against the limitations of medieval knowledge and the restriction put upon humankind announcing that he must accept his place in the universe without challenging it. He breaks the established norms of God-worship and strict morality guided with his high ambition for power and property, is ruined a terrific death. His damnation

is part of his learning. Marlowe admires modernity but informs its excess which will definitely lead to destruction. The constant greed and the dilemma on whether to choose new renaissance values or to remain confined to the old medieval religious values are present in the people of that time. Marlowe warns that the growing fascination or greed towards new modern values might be suicidal. This means that one shouldn't go beyond the normal order of the things and the limitations of humanity. Therefore, Faustus's downfall is due to his own ambition and greed.

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